Robert Rankin's Military Service Record

with particular emphasis on his presence at Valley Forge

As a way of firmly establishing Robert Rankin's presence at Valley Forge, we will examine his entire military record. We will begin with as much evidence as we have from documents in Rankin's Revolutionary War pension file #W26365 and then proceed to general historical evidence and finally attempt to fully construct Robert's Revolutionary War service.

It should be remembered that Robert was in his seventies when his depositions were given. With manual transcription of his words, the long passage of time, and his advanced age, there will be minor inconsistencies and inaccuracies. These are marked by "(sic)". The general truth is clear enough, and the details are clarified by other original documents discussed later in this paper.

Robert Rankin letter, Jul 1828, Washington County, Alabama

- joined (sic - either rejoined or was promoted) as an Ensign in 1780 (sic - 04 Jul 1779)
- shortly after was put under General Lincoln and served until taken prisoner at the Siege of Charleston
- was given a promotion after release as a prisoner of war (sic - occurred 01 Jan 1780, or done retroactively)
- served as a Lieutenant until the close of the War

Robert Rankin declaration, 18 Sep 1828, Washington County, Alabama

- joined the Revolution in 1776 in the 3rd Virginia Regiment (sic - 11th) under the command of Hugh Stevenson
- enlisted as a Private (sic - Sergeant by all indications)
- was later promoted to Ensign
- was promoted to Lieutenant before the War ended
- served for the duration of the War

Robert Rankin statement, 11 Jul 1837, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana

- served as a Lieutenant in the War

Peggy Rankin testimony, 22 Mar 1844, Sixth Judicial Court, the Republic of Texas

- Robert was a Lieutenant during the War
- Robert fought at the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, Stony Point, and the Siege of Charleston
- Robert was taken prisoner at the Siege of Charleston
- Robert's home was in Frederick County, Virginia
- Robert served for the duration of the War

General Historical Evidence

By way of beginning, consider the well-accepted sequence of events in late 1777. Washington himself led his troops in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown in September and November of 1777. Historical accounts are clear that Washington subsequently led these troops to Valley Forge in December. As a basic premise, the troops from these battles also endured the winter at Valley Forge. There will be exceptions (those discharged or "on command" elsewhere), so we must dig further to be certain Robert was present. But, as a general principle, he should have been at Valley Forge since his company fought in these battles with Washington and was subsequently taken to Valley Forge by the commander.

Enlistment

Robert lived in Frederick County, Virginia, and claims to have entered military service "in 1776." He recalls initially serving under Colonel Hugh Stevenson, and Robert served for the duration of the War.

In June 1776, the Continental Congress resolved to create the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment. The unit combined three existing companies from Maryland and Virginia with six new companies - two from Maryland and four from Virginia. The field officers for the new unit were drawn from the original three companies based on their seniority, and Hugh Stephenson from Virginia became the Colonel. All company officers were appointed in the summer of 1776, and subsequent recruiting for the unit in the two states extended to the end of the year. Recruiting occurred in Frederick and Hartford Counties, Maryland, and Berkeley, Frederick, Loudoun,

Fauquier, Prince William, and Culpepper Counties, Virginia. The enlisted men of the regiment served for three years or the duration of the war.

This certainly details Robert's entry point into military service for the Revolutionary War for it perfectly matches his own testimony about his enlistment - in 1776 under Col. Stevenson for the duration of the War. To trace Robert further, we need to look at the subsequent history of the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment. Before continuing, it should be noted that as a member of Col. Hugh Stephenson's Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment Robert was a skilled marksman because the Rifle Regiment recruited sharpshooters.

Early Reorganization

Around June 1777, a selection of elite Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment soldiers were placed in Capt. Gabriel Long's Provisional Rifle Company; the remaining soldiers were placed with Lieut. (and later Capt.) Philip Slaughter in the 11th Virginia Regiment who was the acting commander of the company during Long's nearly two-year attachment to the Rifle Corps and its permanent commander after Long's resignation. Additionally, the Slaughter and related companies fought at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown which matches the testimony of Robert's wife regarding the major battles in which he participated.

[As a side note, the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment took heavy losses at the Battle of Fort Washington in November 1776. For unknown reasons, Robert is believed to NOT have been at this battle - neither was his company captain - although his brother William fought in the battle and was captured.]

If Robert actually joined the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment, we should be able to trace him to either the Captain Gabriel Long Company or to the Captain-Lieutenant Philip Slaughter Company. Indeed this is the case.

As the muster rolls are traced below, Robert is consistently a member of the Captain William Brady Company which is listed along with or as a part of the Captain Gabriel Long Company. Eventually the Captain Brady Company is formally incorporated into the "Philip Slaughter detachment of the Long, Shepherd, West, and Brady companies."

Muster Rolls

* Note that many of the muster rolls indicate enlistment for "3 years", meaning 3 years or the duration of the War

These muster rolls clearly indicate this is our Robert Rankin who initially enlisted in the Maryland and Virginia Rifle Regiment at the appropriate time - July 1776. Additionally, the data match very well with much of Robert and Peggy's testimony about his service record (promotion to Ensign, battles engaged in).

Time Period	Rank	Regiment	Company	Notes
May - Sep 1777	Sergeant	11th VA	Capt. William Brady	Listed with the Capt. Gabriel Long Co. that includes the Shepherd, West, and Brady companies
Nov - Dec 1777	Sergeant	11th VA	Capt. William Brady	Listed with the Capt. Gabriel Long Co. that includes parts of the Shepherd, West, and Brady companies
Jan 1778	Sergeant	11th VA	Capt. William Brady	Listed with the Lieut. Philip Slaughter detachment of the Long, Shepherd, West, and Brady companies
Feb - Mar 1778	Sergeant	11th VA	Lieut. Philip Slaughter	A detachment of the Long, Shepherd, West, and Brady companies **** Valley Forge ****
Apr-May 1778	Sergeant	11th VA	Lieut. Philip Slaughter	A detachment of the Capt. Charles Porterfield Company
Jun - Oct 1778	Sergeant	11th VA	Capt. Charles Porterfield	Enlisted 26 Jul 1776
Nov 1778 - Jun 1779	Sergeant	7th VA	Capt. Charles Porterfield	
Jul - Nov 1779	Ensign	7th VA	Capt. William Johnston	Commissioned 04 Jul 1779

There do not appear to be muster rolls extant beyond late 1779. However, the 7th Virginia Regiment is known to have been captured and taken prisoner at the Siege of Charleston on 12 May 1780, a detail that perfectly matches Robert's own testimony and the last extent muster roll above from just 6 months earlier.

Conclusion

Based on current information and knowledge, there is not a single data point or piece of evidence that indicates our Robert Rankin is not the Robert Rankin traced in the military service records above. His enlistment and early military service through his release as a prisoner of war and subsequent promotion to Lieutenant are clearly documented here.

In addition to the known battles Robert participated in, based on his service record it is very possible he was involved in the following engagements: the Battle of Princeton (Dec 1776) and the Battle of Trenton (Jan 1777).

Robert Rankin's Service History

26 Jul 1776	Enlisted as Sergeant, 11th VA Regiment
Dec 1776	Battle of Princeton (hypothesized)
Jan 1777	Battle of Trenton (hypothesized)
11 Sep 1777	Battle of Brandywine
04 Oct 1777	Battle of Germantown
May 1778	11th and 15th VA Regiments incorporated / transferred to Capt. Porterfield Company
15 Jul 1779	Battle of Stony Point
04 Jul 1779	Appointed Ensign / transferred to 1st (Capt. Johnston) Company
01 Jan 1780	Appointed Lieutenant
12 May 1780	Taken prisoner at the Siege of Charleston
01 Jan 1783	Discharged

Bibliography

- Records of the U. S. National Archives and Records Admin: Revolutionary War Pension Files. File #W26365, Robert Rankin(s).
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryland_and_Virginia_Rifle_Regiment
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/7th_Virginia_Regiment
- Compiled Muster and Pay Rolls, Capt. Gabriel Company Long et al., 11th Virginia Regiment, 1776-1778, NARA M246 Roll 0109, Folder 279.
- Compiled Muster and Pay Rolls, Capt. Charles Porterfield Company, 11th / 15th Virginia Regiment, 1778, NARA M246 Roll 0110, Folder 294.
- Compiled Muster and Pay Rolls, Capt. Charles Porterfield Company, 7th Virginia Regiment, 1778-1779, NARA M246 Roll 0105, Folder 202.
- Compiled Muster and Pay Rolls, Capt. William Johnston Company, 7th Virginia Regiment, 1778-1779, NARA M246 Roll 0105, Folder 200.
- Revolutionary War Rolls, Various Virginia Organizations, NARA M246 Roll 0114, Folder 364.

written by Kevin P. Thompson, Oct 2020